WHAT YOUR COLLEAGUES ARE SAYING . . .

"We all have our own 'Jimmys'—students whose stories stay with us. DeWitt and Nelson blend heartfelt storytelling, practical tools, and research-backed strategies to help school and district teams evaluate and amplify their collective impact. This is a book you'll not only learn from— you'll enjoy reading it too. It doesn't just talk about leadership; it lives it."

—John Hattie
University of Melbourne
Moonee Ponds, Victoria, Australia

"This book offers a candid look at the systemic barriers that persist in education and models the kind of courageous, principle-centered leadership our schools need. It is essential reading for aspiring school leaders committed to centering humanity, context, and hope in all they do."

—Allison Drago
Executive Director of Educational Leadership,
Pacific Lutheran University
Tacoma, Washington

"Peter DeWitt and Michael Nelson once again provide educational leaders with a must-read resource. The thoughtful blend of theory, case studies, and reflective opportunities throughout the book provides change makers with a strong foundation to create lasting impact on student outcomes."

—Sammie Cervantez
Program Specialist,
San Luis Obispo County Office of Education
San Luis Obispo, California

"This book is a great resource for school leaders striving to create a shared vision, engage in purposeful collaboration, and stay focused on what truly matters. Peter and Michael break down big ideas into clear steps that teams can put into action right away. This is a must-read for any leadership team dedicated to professional growth, improving its collective impact, and driving lasting change."

—Chantale Cloutier
Principal, Bliss Carman Middle School
Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada

"In *Lead Collectively*, the authors make a case for collective leader efficacy through this collection of protocols and activities to support leader and team reflections focused on school improvement planning. Each chapter could be a stand-alone workshop."

—Lisa Pryor
Director, EDUTAS, University of Oklahoma
Norman, Oklahoma

"In *Lead Collectively*, Peter and Michael reframe education as a world health issue, urging leadership teams to engage in joint work and shared understanding. Using the Collaborative Inquiry Cycle Placemat, they guide teams from identifying problems of practice to analyzing impact. This book offers a powerful roadmap for transforming practice through data-informed decisions."

—Suzanne M. Rogers
Assistant Director, Public Relations and Alumni
Little Rock, Arkansas

"*Lead Collectively* is the perfect blend of theory, playbook, and reflective activities for educational leaders passionate about collaboration as the vehicle to improve student learning. The authors create a compelling vision for leaders to emulate with each chapter's style and cadence. Readers dive into theory and current leadership examples, and engage in meaningful post-activities designed to encourage readers to take the next step in fostering collective leader efficacy."

—Barb Corbett
Principal, Connaught Street School
Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada

"As school leaders, we often wonder if our daily decisions truly impact our school community. After reading *Lead Collectively* and working with Peter DeWitt and Michael Nelson, I now have clarity. By engaging in joint work, building shared understanding, and using tools like the Frayer Model, our school has a clear focus. We are united in the belief that we can make a meaningful difference in student outcomes."

—Ian Knox
Principal, Hamagrael Elementary
Delmar, New York

"There's no shortage of books on values-driven, mission- and vision-oriented leadership—but few deliver practical, actionable strategies the way this one does. Whether you're leading a campus or an entire district, this book provides a clear roadmap for turning leadership ideals into impactful results across every department."

—Saundra Mouton
Leadership Development Consultant, Fort Bend ISD
Katy, Texas

"*Lead Collectively* is a powerful and practical guide for leadership teams committed to keeping students at the center of their work. Peter and Mike bring authenticity and humility to every chapter, grounding their insights into personal stories and lived experiences from their time as teachers and leaders. What sets this book apart is its practical focus on building an 'evidence mindset,' especially in the final chapter, where leaders are guided to create their own theory of action. This book is more than a professional read—it's an invitation to grow, lead with integrity, and bring about meaningful change in our schools."

—Piedad Kaye
Director of Bilingual/ESL/Foreign Language Programs,
Mannheim District 83
Franklin Park, Illinois

"Peter and Michael's work has helped Arkansas Leadership Academy participants unify the hard data sets that often inform decisions with the intangibles of a classroom and school to create mission- and vision-guided work. Building momentum through collective action and informed leadership with these tools has helped us identify gaps in educator understanding and improve outcomes for students across our state."

—Bradley Webber
Director, Arkansas Leadership Academy
Bentonville, Arkansas

"Peter and Michael have crafted a compelling literary experience that immerses readers in a rich tapestry of stories, thought-provoking questions, and meaningful reflections, all firmly rooted in research. It's a must-read for anyone passionate about empowering students and staff in K–12 education, offering practical strategies, innovative tools, and powerful insights to help every learner thrive."

—Lesleigh Dye
Director of Education, District School Board Ontario North East
Timmins, Ontario, Canada

"Peter and Mike clearly articulate and unpack the values, skills, and culture that underpins high-quality, impactful student-centered leadership in education. This book is a must-read for all educators."

—Aaron Johnston
Deputy Principal and Creator, Mr J's Learning Space
Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

"*Lead Collectively* is a timely and useful resource for leadership teams seeking to transform their impact. By emphasizing collective responsibility, continuous learning, and evidence-informed action, it provides a much-needed bridge between theory and practice. Educators and school leaders will find in it not just a call to action, but also a map for how to walk the talk—together."

—Helen Butler
Educator
Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Lead Collectively

DEDICATIONS

From Michael

*For Hans and Anna, my two hearts
beating outside my body.*

From Peter

*To Doug. Thank you for always being who you are,
because it has made me a better person. You help me talk through
challenges and get me to focus on how situations can be better.*

Lead Collectively

From Belief to Action to Impact

Peter M. DeWitt

Michael Nelson

Foreword by
Michael Butler, Sylvie Arseneau,
and Rosemary Southard

Afterword by
Chris Beals

CORWIN

CORWIN

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Foreword

As New Brunswick Lead (NB Lead) co-chairs, tasked with creating opportunities for New Brunswick's school leaders to grow in their knowledge and practice, we have had the immense privilege of working closely with Peter DeWitt and Michael Nelson over the past two years. Their leadership, insight, and heart have deeply influenced our work and have become part of the fabric of our NB Lead journey.

Peter and Michael have become trusted friends and mentors for us and our school leaders. Our relationship began as a professional collaboration; however, it quickly grew into something more meaningful. What started as an ill-defined vision of creating a network of principals from throughout the province developed into an impactful community of learners thanks to them. Our principals were led on a journey of collaborative inquiry, self-reflection, and professional growth that will continue to pay dividends for years to come.

In this book, *Lead Collectively: From Belief to Action to Impact*, Peter and Michael's true selves shine through. Through their storytelling and personal experiences, they offer readers more than a theory of leadership—they offer a space for reflection, a thinking partner, and a challenge to take action.

Central to their work—and to this powerful book—is the concept of collective efficacy. In a time when leadership can feel increasingly complex and isolating, this book reminds us that working together within a community of practice allows leaders to leverage the collective wisdom, vision, and experience of their colleagues and move forward together. The book also reminds us that school leaders must be learners first—even when things are tough (and probably even more so during those times).

We are grateful to have been working alongside Peter and Michael as this book came into being—and that our principals benefited from the framework they describe so well within its pages. Not only have they have shaped the learning and thinking of those with whom they worked, but they have helped to define the entire approach we use to provide professional learning opportunities to our school leaders.

Their voices as put forth in this book echo what they have modeled for our principals—that leading collectively is not only aspirational; it is foundational to building teacher efficacy and

ultimately improving student learning. They challenge us to reflect upon our interdependence, to reflect upon our practice, and to stay accountable to the outcomes that matter most for our students.

This book is more than a resource. It is a reflection of the incredible learning we've experienced alongside Peter and Michael. It affirms what we've come to know through our partnership: that when we lead collectively, we lead with greater purpose, impact more deeply, and create lasting change.

Michael Butler, Sylvie Arseneau, and Rosemary Southard
NB Lead Co-Chairs

Acknowledgments

From Peter: For anyone who knows me or has seen me speak, you know that I struggled throughout school. Being retained in fourth grade, losing my dad when I was in fifth grade, and graduating fourth from last in my graduating class made me believe that I was unworthy of truly being educated, and I certainly never thought I would find a deep passion for education. It's hard to imagine being passionate about a topic that was the source of so much angst in my life. However, my sister Trish urged me to give community college one more chance, and after my third try, not only did I get an associate's degree, but I went on to earn a bachelor's, two master's, and a doctorate as well.

At the same time Trish urged me in the way only a big sister could, my mom stood next to me and supported me every step along the way. I lost them both, four months apart, a few years ago, but each time I hit a milestone they are the first ones I think of, and I am eternally grateful for the impact they have had on me. In fact, they are the ones who showed me what impact truly is.

Thanks to my brothers Frank and Jody, Hassan, Mary Beth, my nephews and nieces, P2, Mike and Ron, Art and Kenny, Joe and Seth, Mary and Lynn, and Linda and Justin.

Britt Nelson, thank you for always making me feel a part of the family. You have not only invited me into your home more times than I can count, but you also support our ideas, and even bought me a new quilt and hairdryer. And the chef who prepares the meals does a great job. Best accommodations ever.

Lastly, thank you to Michael Nelson. Michael was a colleague first, but became a friend when I needed one the most. I am proud to be your co-author because you make me better.

From Michael: Much of this book was written in the winter, and I found that my daily ritual would be to awake, watch the news, eat some breakfast, and head to my favorite chair by the fireplace to begin writing for the day. After a few hours, I would take a break to exercise and then return to my computer for more writing. What was different about this second book than my first one is that I talked less with others about the book during the writing process. I think I needed to talk about writing

my first book a lot to keep me accountable that I could "run the marathon" of writing.

I found that the motivation to continue writing this second book was rooted in moments with family and friends, particularly sharing a meal and a beverage together. I am grateful to my children Hans and Anna and their spouses Amy and Brian for always being willing to say "yes" for a family Sunday dinner invitation without really knowing their dad needed a writing break. During the process of writing this book, our fourth grandchild was born. Mara joined Carter, Grant, and Maisie as "Papi's" number-one collective motivator for supporting educational leaders. Gatherings with Mary, Dale, Nancy, Jim, Chris, Johnda, and Jill also provided the perfect rejuvenation and nourishment for writing.

It is Britt, my incredible life partner of almost 40 years, who continues to unconditionally embrace my passion for supporting teachers and leaders who are educating our youth. During those winter moments by the fireplace, she would often sit in the chair next to me, sipping coffee and quietly knitting while I typed. Amazingly, I could feel her love with each click of a letter on my keyboard.

Finally, I am grateful to Peter. I continue to be in awe that a person I did not know just four years ago could quickly become one of my dearest friends. Peter, Doug, and their friends and family are now folded into our Nelson family. I find myself (as a West Coast guy) cheering for Penn State because of Peter's family connection to the university! Peter even has his designated bedroom when he stays in our home. Should we go for book #3 together?

From both: During the past couple of years, we have been blessed with many long-term partnerships that continue to greatly impact our work. This includes our connection with the Washington Association of School Administrators and the leadership of Joel Aune and Kim Fry, working with Ashley McDonald and her team at the Excel Center in North Little Rock; Rachel Horn, Caroline Nail, and Bradley Webber at the Arkansas Public School Resource Center; Lesleigh Dye and the leaders of District School Board Ontario North East; and Complex Area Superintendent Stacey Bello, Complex Academic Officer Andrew Scott, and District Education Specialist Iwalani Harris at Ka'u-Kea'aū-Pāhoa Complex Area in Hawaii.

Our partnership with the New Brunswick Teachers' Association—and working with leaders Michael Butler, Sylvie

Arseneau, and Rosemary Southard—has been an experience we will always remember. We are grateful they said "yes" to writing the foreword to our book.

Chris Beals is the leader we both want to become one day. He leads with kindness and empathy. He leads with knowledge and expertise. He leads with integrity and passion. He leads with belief in collective leader efficacy. There was no better person to write our afterword than Chris. You'll understand why after reading it!

Lastly, thank you to John Hattie, Elizabeth Rich from *Education Week*, Pam Berkman, Sara Johnson, and our Corwin team for the support.

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PETER DEWITT

Peter DeWitt, EdD, is the founder and CEO of the Instructional Leadership Collective, and he approaches everything with a learner's mindset. He was a K–5 teacher for eleven years and a principal for eight years. For over twelve years, he has been facilitating professional learning nationally and internationally, based on the content of many of his best-selling educational books.

Peter's professional learning relationships are a monthly hybrid approach that includes both coaching and facilitating workshops on instructional leadership and collective efficacy. His work has been adopted at the state and university levels, and he works with numerous school districts, school boards, regional networks, and ministries of education around North America, Australia, Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and the United Kingdom.

Peter writes the Finding Common Ground column for *Education Week* with Michael Nelson, and they host Corwin's *Leaders Coaching Leaders* podcast. In 2020 DeWitt co-created *Education Week*'s A Seat at the Table where he moderates conversations with experts around the topics of race, gender, research, trauma, and many other educational topics.

Peter is the author, co-author, or contributor of numerous books, and his articles have appeared in educational research journals at the state, national, and international levels. His books have been translated into numerous languages.

MICHAEL NELSON

"There is no more noble profession than that of an educator" was what **Michael Nelson**'s mom said almost every day while he was growing up. For almost forty years, Michael has been an educator. His mom would be pleased.

Even though Michael still considers "teacher" as his primary title, he has served in roles of principal, district instructional leader, superintendent, and assistant executive director developing professional development for the state of Washington, and he currently serves as a thought partner for the Instructional Leadership Collective.

Michael has received many state and national awards during his time as a principal and superintendent. As principal, his school received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award from the U.S. Department of Education. As a superintendent, he was named Washington state's 2019 Superintendent of the Year. During his tenure as superintendent, Michael was elected president of the Washington Association of School Administrators by his peers.

Michael co-facilitates coaching, keynotes, and workshops with Peter. Their first book, *Leading With Intention*, was released in May 2024.

Introduction

MOVING FROM COLLECTING DATA TO USING EVIDENCE

Imagine you are a leader, sitting in your biweekly leadership team meeting with all nine members of your middle school team. As you sit in the meeting, you feel a sense of pride. Your team recently voted to change the name of the school's academic plan to RISE (Roadmap for Improvement and Student Excellence). You didn't choose RISE because it was yet another acronym in education that was needed; instead, you chose it because RISE represents how you want all teachers and leaders in the school to demonstrate the ability to do the actual work.

After several meetings focused on the new RISE plan, your team comes to the consensus that there are three areas of focus for your students: literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional learning. These three areas of focus are directly tied to the district's strategic plan—not exactly groundbreaking, because through reading research, articles in *Education Week*, ASCD's *Educational Leadership*, and Learning Forward's *The Learning Professional*, your team understands that these three areas of focus are part of a worldwide issue. Some might call it a world health issue, impacting the success of our nation and the world as a whole.

At the beginning of the RISE plan meetings, you used a concept attainment strategy called the Frayer Model. You divided your team into groups of three, and they each had to define the word *literacy* using a variety of representations. They defined it, wrote about why it's important, and provided an example and nonexample of literacy. This strategy helped each member of the team deepen their understanding, which will help them be more impactful.

In today's meeting, you move into discussion about what influences collective efficacy, which is shared understanding, joint work, and evidence of impact. It's also about how you want your parents, community, and businesses to talk about your school and the focused work you are doing on behalf of students.

To further this discussion, you break the team into smaller groups of three, each representing a different type of data from Victoria L. Bernhardt's work, which are demographics, perceptions, student learning, and school processes. Bernhardt (2018) says, "Looking across the four types of data allows schools to see what they are doing to get the results they are getting now, what is working, what is not working, and how data elements relate to each other to impact results" (p. 16).

Your team has agreed that over the course of the next four meetings, each group of three will rotate which data set they analyze during the meeting so they can all build mastery across the four data types. Typically, you would be in one of the groups, and someone else from the team would facilitate the learning, but today is your turn. As a leader, you consciously hold the belief that the work of your school is not something only teachers should engage in; you are keenly aware of what you need to learn about the process as well.

Prior to the meeting, one of the teachers on the team emailed everyone a recent article showing that the average reading scores of fourth- and eighth-grade students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress have declined in the last two years, and sadly, two years ago showed the same results. Another member of the team replied with a report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2024) showing that the literacy rates in most developed countries have gone down for adults as well. You realize this has implications for your school, and in order to help students become proficient readers and learners, families must be engaged. It's not new information for you, but the world and the attention spans of the children and adults in it have shortened. After all, you remember when TED Talks were mind-blowing because speakers had to cover a topic in under 18 minutes, or you could read articles that were 2,500 words in length, but now if a video is more than 1 minute long people will struggle to watch, and most blogs are 750 words or less.

Speaking of a changing world, using two inspiring articles on data, you created a short podcast using NotebookLM by Google. The podcast, generated by artificial intelligence (AI), focuses on data pitfalls and the issue of making assumptions about data.

Most of the team listened to the podcast on their drive into school, and a few say they listened when they were on the treadmill. As your team looks at their data using a protocol to keep their small-group collaboration focused, you hear some of the following conversations:

DEMOGRAPHICS GROUP

"We know that students living in poverty are at risk, but we have to look past that. The 2024 OECD article Maisie sent us said, 'Adults with highly educated parents outscored those with low-educated parents by 50 points in literacy,' but that doesn't mean we can't change that dynamic."

One of the reasons why focusing on demographic data is so important is that it can highlight inequities within our system. Whether those inequities are evidenced by historically under-served students being missing from our Advanced Placement courses, or whether they operate within the assumptions people make when they say their students are high poverty, demographic data give us the opportunity to begin addressing issues of underserved populations.

After a conversation about equity, the group's focus turns to teacher preparation. "More than 50 percent of our teachers did not have a lot of exposure to literacy instruction in their preservice programs," one member points out, "and many of our veteran teachers have not had literacy training in the last three years."

PERCEPTIONS GROUP

Grant, one of the instructional coaches, talks about empathy interview answers that he and the team completed with random students from each grade level. They found that many students said their teachers went too fast when it came to teaching literacy skills. When the students were asked about success criteria, most of the students said teachers didn't refer to it much. This aligned with some of their other perception data because, Grant says, "On the recent survey teachers filled out, 40 percent of them said they did not feel confident teaching reading. And the family survey data showed that parents did not necessarily feel comfortable asking teachers for help when it comes to supporting their children's literacy at home."

Jylese, another teacher in the group, suggests a parent who might be able to talk with teachers about how to engage parents, and the group seems interested in hearing more.

STUDENT LEARNING GROUP

Mara is looking at the overall results from the recent i-Ready progress monitoring tool, which shows that while many students are making progress, a couple of subgroups are not

showing growth. She used AI to create a table that shows a gap analysis to help the team understand what has been missing from their conversation. They explore whether

- professional learning communities are leading to instructional improvement,

- materials are being used effectively, and

- families are participating.

SCHOOL PROCESSES GROUP

Carter, the school psychologist on the team, can be heard saying, "We have to explore how our new curriculum based on the Science of Reading is impacting student literacy. Is the curriculum helping meet the needs of our students? Is it that our teachers don't have the knowledge and skills yet to implement it with fidelity?" You smile, having heard the same conversation being explored by Mara's group.

The small collaborative teams have about five more minutes before they come back to the whole group, and Tevyn, your other instructional coach, will lead the whole group through the ORID protocol, which focuses on *Objective*—What do we know? (Facts, Data, Observations), *Reflective*—How do we feel? (Emotions, Reactions, Connections), *Interpretive*—What does it mean? (Patterns, Significance, Analysis), and *Decisional*—What will we do? (Next Steps, Actions, Commitments).

It is the content from next steps within the Decisional phase that helps you build your work and conversations between meetings and supports you in building your next meeting agenda. It also helps you bring together conversations from all of the groups.

Putting the team into smaller groups to explore the data that they collect throughout the year has been ongoing over the last few meetings. The goal for the team is to have as much information as possible from multiple measures of data so they can specifically identify the improvement they are trying to make when it comes to student learning.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Perhaps as you read this introduction you feel that your team is in the exact same place as the team represented here, or maybe you feel that your team is so far away from possessing the knowledge and skills necessary to even have a conversation about equity, literacy, or grading that you want to close the book

and find another. Either way, there are tools, strategies, and resources in this book to support you, so please keep reading.

This book is divided into four parts that focus on three important influencers of collective leader efficacy.

- **Part I** sets the stage and presents practical research on collective leader efficacy.

- **Part II** focuses on shared understanding.

- **Part III** focuses on joint work.

- **Part IV** focuses on evidence of impact.

Think of this book as a combination playbook and workbook, and it will help your team engage in the same kinds of conversations as the team in our introduction.

At the beginning of each part, you will find the Frayer Model (Frayer et al., 1969), which we used in the opening story. The Frayer Model is an impactful strategy for many reasons, especially when considering examples and nonexamples. Durkin and Rittle-Johnson (2012) found that "comparing incorrect examples to correct examples led to better performance than comparing correct examples." Using both examples and nonexamples led students to concept mastery more than just the use of examples alone. The Frayer Model and other strategies we share throughout this book will help lead your team to mastery as well.

WHAT IS COLLECTIVE LEADER EFFICACY?

Collective leader efficacy is a school or district leadership team's belief in developing a shared understanding, engaging in joint work, and evaluating the impact they have on the learning of adults and students in a school.

When we think of shared understanding, joint work, and evidence of impact, they act as a three-legged stool. If one leg is missing, the stool tips over. If one leg is longer or shorter than the others, it becomes wobbly. Our purpose in this book is to help you build a three-legged stool that doesn't wobble but instead stands strong, and we will use a variety of methods to help get you there.

For the past 50 years, research has focused on how collective efficacy is defined by the belief team members have in each other. Collective leader efficacy, in particular, happens when

a leadership team comes together, focuses on a learning goal among their group, and does the work together to learn and achieve that goal, which will ultimately have a positive impact on students. For those leaders who lack experience walking into classrooms or knowing what to talk about in formal observations, collective leader efficacy is about helping them focus on making those experiences more meaningful. This effort is less about compliance and more about growth and learning.

We would like you to read the book through two lenses. The first lens is growth for your own personal development as a leader, and the second is growth in your ability to facilitate learning and growth among those you lead.

OUR EXPERIENCE

Over the last few decades, we have engaged in research and practice as practitioners both in the classroom and at the school level, and Michael was also a school superintendent for 14 years. Those experiences laid a great foundation for us to engage in the work of developing collective leader efficacy, which is what happens when your team engages in conversations like the one we described.

Over the time that we have researched the content for this book—engaged in our hybrid approach to professional learning with groups in the Arkansas Leadership Academy, District School Board Ontario North East, New Brunswick Teachers' Association, Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership in Melbourne, Queensland Department of Education in Brisbane, Next Level Leaders in Washington state, and our Global Instructional Leadership Network, or coaching Ka'ū-Kea'au-Pāhoa school leaders on the Big Island of Hawaii— we have learned a lot about how to develop a shared understanding, how to engage in joint work, and what it means to evaluate our own impact.

Through this book, we will provide stories, research, reflective points, protocols, and rubrics to help guide your team, regardless of whether they are at the building or district level, to strengthen the work that influences collective efficacy and move them from collecting data to using it as evidence to analyze and interpret what it says.

We are grateful you are here, so please stick with us, because our areas of growth are real, and education is a world health issue we all need to work on and solve together.

—Michael and Peter

INTRODUCTORY SURVEY

SURVEY SAYS!

Let's begin with a reflective survey we would like you to take before reading this book. Have your team take the survey too. You will find this survey at the end of the book as well. Consider it a pre- and postreflection assessment.

After you and your team complete the survey, take time to review your combined answers. A word of caution: This is for reflection and conversation, and not meant to create judgment or be a test of how well your team collaborates.

Instructions: For each statement, rate your level of agreement on a scale from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*).

Section 1: Shared Understanding (Trust, Clarity, and Coherence)

Our team has a clear, shared understanding of our school's vision and priorities.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

We believe that having a shared understanding improves our ability to lead effectively.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

We use common language and aligned expectations when discussing instructional practices.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

I feel confident that I understand my role in achieving our shared goals.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

We regularly check for understanding and adjust communication to strengthen alignment.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Section 2: Joint Work (Culture, Network, and Systems)

Collaboration within our team is purposeful, with clear roles and shared responsibility.

1	2	3	4	5

We engage in collective problem-solving rather than working in silos.

1	2	3	4	5

I believe my contributions to our joint work are valued and impactful.

1	2	3	4	5

I feel confident that our team can implement and sustain shared initiatives effectively.

1	2	3	4	5

Our team effectively balances autonomy and interdependence in decision-making.

1	2	3	4	5

Section 3: Evidence of Impact (Student Learning, Professional Learning and Growth, and Leadership and Decision-Making)

We regularly collect and analyze multiple forms of evidence (data, observations, and feedback) to inform our decisions.

1	2	3	4	5

Our team ensures that leadership decisions are data driven and informed by diverse perspectives.

1	2	3	4	5

I believe our team has the ability to make evidence-based decisions that improve student learning.

1	2	3	4	5

I feel confident in our team's ability to reflect on the effectiveness of our strategies and adjust based on what the evidence tells us.

1   2   3   4   5

Our team believes in our collective ability to drive meaningful improvement in student learning.

1   2   3   4   5

NEXT STEPS

- **Scoring:** Each respondent adds up their score for each section. The highest-possible score for each section is 25 points.

- **Reflection:** Discuss the survey results as a team. Examine questions such as "Where do we have strong belief and confidence?" and "Where do we need to build it?"

- **Action Planning:** Identify areas in each section to strengthen shared belief, trust, and confidence in leadership work.

PART I

Leadership Foundation

This Frayer Model is intended to provide a meaningful representation of the concept of collective leader efficacy. Blank Frayer Models are provided for you in Appendices A.13–A.16. After you finish reading and reflecting on the chapters in Part I, consider completing your own Frayer Model for the concept of collective leader efficacy (see Appendix A.13).

Definition

Collective leader efficacy is a school or district leadership team's shared belief in developing a shared understanding, engaging in joint work, and evaluating the impact they have on the learning of adults and students in a school.

Illustration

Shared Understanding
Trust
Coherence
Clarity

Joint Work
Culture
Network
Systems

Evidence of Impact
Student Learning
Leadership and Decision-Making
Professional Learning and Growth

Collective Leader Efficacy Cycle

Collective Leader Efficacy

Example

Leadership teams use data to collectively understand their strengths and areas of growth. They choose an area of growth focused on student outcomes, and work together to develop strategies that can be used in individual classrooms and across the school or district that will positively impact student learning.

Nonexample

School staff often work in isolation. What happens in each classroom is not connected to a greater school or district priority. One leader sets the tone and focus of the meeting, which focuses more on management and adult issues than on student outcomes.

· ··

How Are Your Priorities Focused on Student Outcomes?

By the end of this chapter, as a teacher, school leader, or district leader, you will:

- Identify your leadership beliefs, values, and vision for being the leader you want to be.

- Identify leadership lessons that you have learned.

- Identify how to put students at the core of your leadership team's focus.

Let the doors open to collective leader efficacy!

DOOR #1: DEVELOPING YOUR BELIEFS, VALUES, AND VISION

We both remember growing up with our parents watching *Let's Make a Deal* when Monty Hall was the host. Even though the show is still on the air with a different host, neither of us have watched it in many years. The concept, however, remains the same. Contestants dress up, and the host walks up and

down the aisles until someone is picked. The game is a concept of choice in order to make a "good deal."

Often, contestants must choose what is behind Door #1, #2, or #3 or pick what is in the box or behind the curtain. Advice is shouted out from audience members who are dressed as different characters from their favorite movies or books because they all have the goal to be the next contestant. What's interesting about the audience providing advice is that unlike the school in our introduction, they have no data or pieces of evidence that are different from the actual player of the game.

As leaders, even though we didn't wear crazy costumes, we were chosen for our position, and we often have external human distractors who share their thoughts about how we should lead. *Let's Make a Deal* is a game filled with dealmaking choices. However, which door you open or box you choose is not based on a set of beliefs, values, or vision. It's a game of chance.

Leadership is not a game of chance. When opening doors to new learning opportunities (such as reading this book), it is important to be clear about our beliefs, values, and vision for the type of leader we want to be, and the type of impact we want to have on our school or district.

However, that's not easily done, and it takes time. In fact, if we do leadership correctly, our beliefs, values, and visions will evolve over time as a result of the experiences that we share with staff, students, and the greater community, and the new learning we are introduced to. (Note: If your core beliefs already value the experiences students have in your school, then that should never change. But, be open to the idea that how you provide those experiences might change.)

Making the decision to lead can be scary for some educators. It's very easy to complain about our leaders when we aren't in the position, but taking on a leadership position quickly helps us realize that leaders all face challenges.

The two of us had very different experiences when entering into school leadership. In our Finding Common Ground column for *Education Week* (DeWitt & Nelson, 2024d), we wrote about our entry into leadership. For Peter the idea of being a leader was very foreign to him because he never considered himself a leader, and strongly felt he lacked the qualities to be a leader. For Michael, things were a bit different. Here is an adapted excerpt from that column:

FINDING COMMON GROUND

How to Be the Kind of Education
Leader You Want to Be

"I think you should change your focus from educational psychology to school administration," Mr. May, my (Peter) principal told me. I was in my third year of teaching. I quickly said, "No, I'm never going to be a principal."

At the gym later that day, I met two colleagues, Tony and Joe, who were retired teachers and shared the conversation I had with Mr. May. Joe looked at me and said, "What if you could be the leader you want to be rather than the one you feel you have to be?" As many have said after looking back following a life-changing question, "The rest is history."

Although Michael had a not-so-jarring interaction with his principal and colleagues, both of us had others see things in us that we didn't fully recognize. We both carefully navigated the process of becoming an educational leader and, without yet knowing each other, established three areas foundational to our leadership philosophies: our educational beliefs, values, and vision. We began to journal and talk about those three areas with friends, family, and colleagues.

Now, we have established questions in those three areas that we use when working with teachers and leaders who wonder about their futures.

Beliefs: What are your beliefs about education?

- How do you see the role of education in promoting equity and inclusion?

- How do your beliefs about education, and specifically learning, influence the way you address challenges or advocate change?

- In what ways do you think public education should evolve to meet the needs of today's students and families?

Values: What do you value as it pertains to
student and/or adult learning?

- What characteristics of effective student and adult learning do you prioritize in your school or district?

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- How do your values shape your expectations for professional development or instructional practices?

- In what ways do you ensure that your values align with those of your school community?

- How do you recognize and celebrate when your values are reflected in the work of students or staff?

Vision: What if you could be the leader or classroom teacher you want to be? What would that look like?

- How would you describe your leadership or teaching style if you were at your best every day?

- What impact would your ideal leadership or teaching have on the culture of your school or district?

- How would your relationships with students, staff, and families change if you fully embodied your vision?

- What specific student outcomes would you hope to achieve as the leader or teacher you aspire to be?

- What legacy do you want to leave behind in your role as a leader or teacher, and how does that reflect your vision?

Leaders we work with have often shared that they have not gone through the process of personally establishing their beliefs, values, and vision. Once established, it is easier for leaders to align school or district goals, priorities, and decisions with their own behaviors and actions.

As a principal, Michael asked each staff member to answer these questions as it pertained to classrooms. Their responses were put in a notebook that was placed in the foyer of his school for parents and visitors to read.

That notebook served as a clearly stated document of the collective beliefs, values, and mission of the school. These documents can also be placed on school and classroom websites, put on posters outside each classroom door, and included in newsletters and other forms of communication.

Too often, we feel like we need to act and behave as we have observed, but conversations about beliefs, values, and visions can help education administrators lead genuinely, thus making connections with the staff, students, and families whom they serve.

We believe these stories set the stage for the rest of the book. It's also important to note here that this book, including these places to pause and reflect, are not just important if you are new to school or district leadership. These sections are important for seasoned leaders as well. In our experience, sometimes the only moments you have to pause and reflect are when reading a book like this.

Consider your beliefs, values, and vision as you work your way through this book. Our hope is that we challenge you when it comes to topics like collaboration and deep learning. One of the other ways we hope to challenge you is in how you slow down, focus, and add intentionality to what you do.

So let's take time to pause, reflect, and process. This is something we will ask you to do quite a bit throughout the book. There are a number of reasons why stopping periodically for reflection is important:

- It's difficult to read a whole chapter and then reflect at the end.

- For our brains (and attention spans), it's better to take time to reflect and consider our own context often enough to keep us focused on the content, but not so much that it distracts from the reading.

- As Michael has said many times to readers of our book *Leading With Intention*, we want you to finish this book feeling like the third author.

PAUSE
REFLECT
PROCESS

Using the three main questions under the headings of beliefs, values, and vision, write your leadership reflections for the leader you want to be.

Beliefs: What are your beliefs about education?

Values: What do you value as it pertains to student and/or adult learning?

Vision: What if you could be the leader or classroom teacher you want to be? What would that look like?

The use of games is another way to help us pause, reflect, and process in order to solidify our leadership thinking. We already discussed *Let's Make a Deal*, which forces us to pause, reflect, and consider our options before making a decision. We can also use games, such as creating a quick elevator speech, to challenge ourselves to answer a question or prompt without the benefit of pause and reflection.

We actually play the elevator speech game quite often. With all our travel, we find that we actually spend a lot of time on elevators! The challenge is usually directly about a piece of a workshop or portion of a book in which we are working. The elevator doors open, and we step in. Just before they close, the person who has the challenge (listener) reveals their prompt. One such topic we recently explored focused on "why you believe the Ina Garten blog should be included in Chapter 1 of our book." Another time it was "your thoughts about using our leadership quadrant at the beginning of the workshop." Unlike teacher, building, and district teams in which some can be quite large, it is just the two of us working on our projects; yet we do find times after these elevator experiences where we are not fully aligned in our thinking. These quick experiences give us the opportunity to calibrate and dive deeper into the topic. We discover that more often than not in building this shared understanding, we create something even better than either of us individually imagined.

During the 15–30 seconds of imagined elevator ride time, the person being challenged (speaker) must quickly respond to a prompt, such as "What does student engagement look like and feel like?" or "If you could define the purpose of our presentation in an Instagram video, what would you say?" There are two rules for the speaker: They must begin talking as soon as the prompt has been shared (reflection is not allowed), and they must talk continuously. For the listener, there is only one rule at this time: listen without interruption.

When we step off the "elevator," the listener asks for one more thought from the speaker. At that point the speaker stops, and the listener asks a few questions to clarify what has been shared. This forced response without preparation or thinking is incredibly insightful. We often find that the listener will say, "I never thought about it in that way" or "You made me think of something new." It helps develop a deeper shared understanding about the topic we are talking about.

PAUSE
REFLECT
PROCESS

Elevator Speech

Take time here to pause and reflect on what your elevator speech might be.

Prompt: What are some strategies your team uses to develop a shared understanding?

Whether we are referring to *Let's Make a Deal* or an elevator speech, we are hoping this will help you create stronger connections with your team, as well as your staff, students, and school community. In order to do that work with your team, you need to be open to the lessons you can learn about yourself along the way. Too often leaders believe they are supposed to know it all, when in reality, leadership is about having a learner's mindset. To get that started, let's imagine you are still playing *Let's Make a Deal*, and you just decided to open Door #2.

DOOR #2: DEVELOPING YOUR OWN SET OF LEADERSHIP LESSONS

Door #2 is about you moving beyond your values and beliefs to developing your own leadership lessons. We all have lessons, like the lesson Peter learned from Tony and Joe at the gym. Perhaps you have some lessons that help make you who you are, and can help others you lead.

Let's take another opportunity to find some common ground. Believe it or not, it was inspired by Chef Ina Garten (DeWitt & Nelson, 2024c), of whom Michael has been a big fan over the years.

FIVE EDUCATION LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM CHEF INA GARTEN

Both of us love to cook. OK, Peter enjoys it, but Michael is a gourmet who puts a lot of thought and love into his meals. In fact, it's one of his love languages.

Ina Garten, whom Michael considers a dear friend yet has never met, is one of his favorite cookbook authors. Garten released her memoir, *Be Ready When the Luck Happens* (2024), and he ordered his copy. Her story is remarkable, but after reading her chapter titled "1,000 Baguettes and the Business End of a Gun" we realized she had embedded five leadership lessons in the book for education administrators.

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Ina Garten Leadership Lesson #1: Find Ways to Connect With Staff and Your Community

"One thing I learned, and continue to learn every day, is that the food we enjoy most connects to our deepest memories of when we felt happy, comfortable, nurtured. It could be something from childhood or a taste that somehow made us feel good, even if we didn't know why" (Garten, 2024, p. 148).

When Michael became a principal, he began cooking for his staff members. He saw remarkable things occur when they began to break bread together. Research shows breaking bread can foster trust and camaraderie, reduce perceptions of inequality, and make people feel more closely connected. We certainly experienced that when we were both principals sharing meals with our staff. Sharing a meal does connect people to each other.

Ina Garten Leadership Lesson #2: Create Spaces Where Everyone Feels Comfortable

"Anna taught me to stock the shelves and then remove one item so it's not perfect. That way, customers don't subliminally feel that they're ruining the display by taking something off of the shelf. I wanted the store to say, 'Please touch!' and 'Please taste!' Basically, I wanted everyone to feel right at home" (Garten, 2024, p. 149).

As former school leaders (and Michael was a superintendent), we both found that many of the parents we served were not comfortable in our schools and, in particular, in our office. Whether it was asking parents to call us by our first name, sending out short video clips before open houses and Parent–Teacher Association meetings to give parents ideas of what they would see when they visited, or just making sure we were constantly visible at events where we could engage with families, we acted in ways to help parents feel at home when they came to school.

Ina Garten Leadership Lesson #3: Learn as Many Names as Possible

"I thought about every part of an interaction with customers. For example, we greeted them by name, if we knew them, and if we didn't, we'd find out and remember it for next time" (Garten, 2024, p. 148).

When we both took new leadership positions in a school or district, we would ask for staff and classroom photos as well as yearbooks so we could study our new teams and be ready to call them by their names. More often than not, when we were meeting students and staff for the first time, we could call them by name.

Not only did this show we cared about them as individuals; it also modeled the type of culture we wanted to build at the school. We wanted to know each student by name, which we believe is the first step to understanding their individual learning needs.

Ina Garten Leadership Lesson #4:
Ask How You Can Help Support

"We never asked, 'Is that all?' but rather 'What else can I get you?' like we had all the time in the world for them" (Garten, 2024, p. 149).

Imagine if, after all conversations in which we were supporting students, parents, and/or colleagues, we ended by asking, "What else can we do for you?" This simple and powerful question is an honoring leadership move that profoundly models listening in a way that builds understanding.

Physicians have often shared that a patient's first question is not always the real question they want to ask. Patients may feel reluctant to ask their physicians questions for several reasons. In broad terms, patients with diminished feelings of self-efficacy and those who view the physician as the decision-maker are hesitant to express their opinions and to ask questions.

This could be due to fear, uncertainty, or desire to appear informed. Students and families—especially those who have not previously had positive school experiences—often have the same fears or uncertainties.

How might this parallel our leadership work in education? Asking "What else can we do for you?" allows the student, parent, and/or colleague the opportunity to reflect and, for some, have the courage to share the most pressing need.

Ina Garten Leadership Lesson #5:
What Is Your Main Priority?

"Anna taught me that often 'less is more' and 'quality is everything'" (Garten, 2024, p. 147).

In working with education leaders from Australia to Canada and throughout the United States, we've noted a common theme among all: "We do not have time to do all the things we want to do."

Some share that their systems have too many initiatives while others share they are spending the majority of their time on management-type duties. One of the leadership moves we take in our work is to help teachers and leaders see where they are spending their time and which parts of their workload they truly have control over.

Ina's five leadership lessons for running a great retail business can easily be transformed into leadership advice for educators. As Ina always says as she completes the demonstration of a recipe, "How easy is that?"

Your leadership lessons are important, so we are giving you two pages to pause, reflect, and process Ina's lessons and begin generating some of your own. Let's take a step back, breathe a little deeper, and process each of the leadership lessons within your own context.

Ina Garten Leadership Lesson #1

What do you do to help bring staff or colleagues together?

Ina Garten Leadership Lesson #2

How do you help people feel (psychologically) safe and welcome in your classroom, school, or district?

Ina Garten Leadership Lesson #3

What are some of the practices you engage in that help students and adults feel seen?

Ina Garten Leadership Lesson #4

What are some of the practices you engage in that help students and adults feel heard and understood?

Ina Garten Leadership Lesson #5

If you were to choose your most important priority to focus on, what would it be?

After reflecting on these five lessons, what are some lessons that you could teach others?

1.

2.

3.

Clearly, Ina's list is beneficial for all of us who are in leadership positions. The final reflection question is fairly complicated, though. It requires us to look at data and evidence, engage in deep conversations, and do a lot of reflection to decide where to start. What you wrote down matters to you, and that's important, but after you make your way through each chapter, you will find that the focus you wrote down evolves or deepens.

The final door of opportunity we will look behind in Chapter 1 can be hard for educators to prioritize. In our work we find that teams focus a lot on raising test scores, but we want you to shift your thinking to put students at the core. This idea brings together Ina's third and fourth lessons.

DOOR #3: KEEPING STUDENTS AT THE CORE

One of the strategies we will use to help you go from merely thinking about test scores to actually focusing on what truly matters is to bring it back to our students. Our friend Tom Guskey has always said that if we want our priorities to truly work, and if we want professional learning to stick, we need to tie our priorities to student outcomes.

It's important for us to think about our work within the context of how it can impact students. Each of you reading this could have a different role. You might be a superintendent, an assistant superintendent, a principal, a teacher, an instructional coach, a school psychologist, or even a counselor. It doesn't matter your position; we all have students who have stayed with us years after they went through our classroom or school.

At your next meeting, provide time for each member of the team to discuss one student who has impacted them in their career. Whether you provide time for people to talk with a partner, in a small group, or as a whole group is dependent on your allotted time and size of the group, but after you are finished, create a poster or graphic with the students' names on it, and keep it somewhere in your meeting space as a consistent reminder to bring conversations back to students. In fact, make a reflection on students part of the success criteria for your meetings. We would like to bring it back to students with a story from Michael (Nelson, 2024).

THE STORY OF JIMMY

Michael was 22 when he began teaching. His first position was teaching second grade at Orting Elementary School in Washington state. He clearly remembers the pressure he felt to have all students make significant progress during their year.

Even in the mid-1980s, Orting had moved to standards-based practices. The principal asked us to use our classroom assessments to evaluate each child on grade-level student-learning objectives for reading, writing, and mathematics before filling out their report cards. At Orting, the report cards contained both checklists and narrative sections and were turned into the principal for his review prior to being distributed to families.

Jimmy had strawberry blond hair and blue eyes. He was on the shorter side of students in our classroom and was stout for an 8-year-old. He had a grin (not smile) that could light up a room.

In drafting his first set of report cards, it became clear to Michael that Jimmy wasn't meeting standards.

He tried a variety of strategies, but often, Jimmy would just sit. If Michael nudged too much, Jimmy's eyes would well up. Even though Michael was very nervous, he called Jimmy's dad to see if they could meet. Jimmy's dad said his hours were long and he could not meet. Michael offered to go to Jimmy's home, and after a bit of back-and-forth, Jimmy's dad agreed to meet at 7:30 one evening.

At the time, Michael didn't question doing this, and he didn't tell the principal or other staff this is what he had arranged. It was a cold, dark, rainy evening in the Pacific Northwest when he drove toward Jimmy's home, which was significantly off the main road. After driving for what felt like several miles, Michael arrived at a small bubble trailer. Before he was able to get out of his car, Jimmy was at the car window with his grin.

Jimmy invited Michael up the two steps of the trailer, and together, they walked through the small door. His dad's first words were "I don't know who you are, Mr. Nelson, but Jimmy here talks about you all the time. He thinks you are something special, and I am grateful. It's like he has come out of his shell for the past two months."

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At this moment, tears were welling in Michael's eyes. Michael had gone to their house to "tell" in a tough manner that Jimmy was behind and they all needed to do something. Instead, he chose to listen. He also shared how much he enjoyed having Jimmy in class and how much he wanted to support Jimmy with his learning but they had some catching up to do.

Even though Jimmy's father clearly told him he could not teach Jimmy, Michael asked for his help, and he agreed to support Michael.

Jimmy made progress and became a reader during that year. Michael quickly realized that moment wasn't entirely about Jimmy. It was a life lesson for Michael, and as he looks back, he would consider it one of his greatest learning experiences as an educator. Among the lessons he learned were these:

- **Demonstrate empathy and understanding.** Jimmy's home environment was very different from the one in which Michael was raised. He needed to always have empathy for the many things he might not know about students (and staff).

- **Believe in positive intent.** Jimmy's father was trying to be the best parent he could be. Michael needed to always believe parents had positive intent.

- **Listen first.** Jimmy's father actually wanted Michael to hear *their* story. He needed to listen with an open mind and heart.

- **Meet people where they are.** Jimmy's father never came to the classroom for a meeting even though they met in person many times during that school year. Michael needed to go to him.

- **Always show kindness and compassion.** Jimmy's father wanted to know Michael cared about his son. Michael needed to demonstrate love, kindness, and compassion.

Note: This story has been adapted from an article written by Michael for the Finding Common Ground blog (see Nelson, 2024).

PAUSE REFLECT PROCESS

As we close out the chapter, take some time to write your student story. Who is your "Jimmy"?

Chapter Summary

In this opening chapter we brought together three stories: *Let's Make a Deal,* lessons from Ina Garten, and a story about Jimmy. This was purposeful if not a little unconventional, but through these stories we pulled out three important leadership practices: developing your beliefs, values, and vision; developing your own set of leadership lessons; and keeping students at the core.

What made the *Let's Make a Deal* game show so engaging for audiences was the element of surprise. As an audience member, you cheered when a contestant was successful, and you laughed when a contestant chose the wrong door that revealed something ridiculous, like a can of beans. In homes across the world, armchair quarterbacks quickly said, "I would not have chosen that box." But it's not the contestants' fault; they did not know and were blind to seeing the best path to success.

In education, we want *all* of our students to be successful, but we often don't bring them fully into our decision-making. We focus on test scores, and sometimes have implicit biases about which students can do well in school and which ones most likely will not. The three doors in this chapter were visible and clear with intention and purpose.

For leaders, there may be times when you feel you can't see the next step. In those moments, pull yourself back to your leadership beliefs, values, and vision; remember the leadership lessons you have already learned; and keep students at the core.

In our success criteria for this chapter, we wanted you to identify your beliefs, values, and vision as a leader. You also needed to take time to consider leadership lessons you have learned, and identify how you put students at the core. Were you able to:

- Identify your leadership beliefs, values, and vision for being the leader you want to be?

- Identify leadership lessons that you have learned?

- Identify how you put students at the core of your leadership team's focus?

In the next chapter, we will provide research on collective leader efficacy. Collective leader efficacy is based on a belief that a leadership team has with each other, and it's often seen as the same as collective teacher efficacy, but there are some slight differences. In Chapter 2, we will explore why collective leader efficacy is needed for systemic change.

Team Activities

Most books come with discussion questions at the end of the chapter, but we want to offer team activities instead. Think of it as Universal Design for Learning, because we are asking you to think outside the box when it comes to reflecting on the content you just read. Here are three different ways to explore what you have learned.

The Leadership Game Show: Imagine you are a contestant on a leadership version of *Let's Make a Deal*. You are presented with three doors:

- Door #1: A leadership path guided entirely by external opinions and expectations.

- Door #2: A leadership path shaped by deeply personal beliefs, values, and vision.

- Door #3: A leadership path dictated by short-term goals and reactive decision-making.

Which door would you choose, and why? How would making this choice shape the culture of your school or district?

The Legacy Letter: Write a letter to your future self, five years from now. In this letter, describe the kind of leader you hope to become, the impact you want to have on students and staff, and the values you want to uphold. What specific actions can you take today to move closer to this vision?

Your Leadership Playlist: If your leadership journey were a playlist, what three songs would be on it? Identify a song that represents your *beliefs*, one that reflects your *values*, and one that symbolizes your *vision*. Explain why you chose each song and how it connects to your leadership philosophy.